

**Date:** July 8-9, 2023

**Title:** "Offer This"

**Scripture:** Hebrews 13:15-16

**Speaker:** Kurt Bjorklund

If you've been around Orchard Hill, you know that what we typically do during this time is work through sections of the Bible or whole books of the Bible. And what that means is that I typically from week to week, don't pick the topic or the scripture. It's selected ahead of time, and then we just take what's up next. And we do that for a variety of reasons.

One of them is so that my dispositions or preferences don't emerge more to the top, but that the Scripture itself shapes what we talk about. And so, after the choice is made, that is how we go. And so next week I wanted to start a new series for KidsFest, and we're going to spend three weeks in Matthew chapter four looking at our identity and how we shape our identity. But it meant that this week, because of coming off July 4th, was an empty week in the calendar. So, I actually had a chance to look at Scripture and to decide what it was that we would talk about today. And I was reading through Hebrews and decided to talk about Hebrews 13, verses 15 and 16.

But let me start with this. When you're invited somewhere, what's one of the first questions that you ask? Can I bring something? What can I bring? Now, some of you don't answer that question or ask that question. Some of you do. Some of you with somebody say nothing. You're like, cool, I don't have to bring anything. But most of the time when you hit a certain stage in life, you say, I want to bring something because I want to participate in what it is that is happening, and I don't want to show up without offering something.

And what happens for some of us is we transfer this idea to our faith. And so, we start to have this idea that if I'm going to be a person of faith, then I have to bring something to God. And what we end up with sometimes is this idea that basically says, I offer something, and if I bring good things, then God gives good things to me. So, the more faithful I am, the more I participate in church, the more I give, the more that I serve, all of these things will ensure good in my life. Now, the challenge with that is that's actually not Christianity, it's karma. And that isn't necessarily what the Bible teaches.

But there is another challenge with this, and that is, in the Bible, there's a sense in which we bring nothing. This is what Ephesians two teaches, that it's by grace, through faith, not of ourselves. It's a gift of God, not work. So that you can't boast. In other words, the message of Christianity in part is that you bring nothing into all the work of Jesus. You don't have to perform to get. But at the same time, there is this idea that Christianity asks everything. When Jesus was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew five, after all of these soaring stipulations or ideals, he says, be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.

So the question is, which is it? You bring nothing? Or is it perfection? Which is it that Christianity asks for? Well, when you read through the Old Testament, there was something

that was known as the sacrifice system. And what it was, was the idea that people would bring a sacrifice as a way to say to God, I am offering something to you. And Jesus was the sacrifice. The once for all sacrifice. But yet, the New Testament writers don't hesitate to employ sacrificial language to talk about offering something.

And one of the places where this is true is in Hebrews Chapter 13 verses 15 and 16. And so what I'd like to do is just talk a little bit about sacrifice and what it is that we have to offer. Sometimes we see sacrifice in our day and age as a little bit of a dirty word. Like, I don't want to sacrifice, I want the benefits, rather than what is it that maybe God asks.

And sometimes what happens when people do talk about this is it becomes a little bit of what one author called a debtor's ethic. And what a debtor's ethic is, is the idea that God's done so much for you, so you should for God. And so, it isn't you do it to earn, but it's a since God has, now you should, and it becomes almost as cumbersome.

I heard about one boy who was from an orphanage and was adopted into a family, and when he came from the orphanage, he had very little in the way of possessions. He had some clothes that weren't in very good shape and some shoes that were in really rough shape. When he came into this house, the dad took the shoes and put them on the mantel as a little reminder of where this kid came from. And whenever the kid would do something that was kind of off the way that the dad wanted him to live or do something, he would just simply get out the shoes and say, did you see these shoes? This is where you came from. But look at what you have now. And the boy, out of shame and almost obligation, said, okay, I'll do what you want. And soon it got to where all the dad had to do was point at the shoes or look at the shoes and the kid would get the message. Okay, I get it. You have given me a lot, and so I should do what you want.

And sometimes that's the perception of faith. Like God's done so much. Of course, you have to do everything. And I drew a little picture just to kind of speak of this. And so, on one hand, there's a choice, and on the other hand, there's a response. And we need the two to work together. And what I'm referring to here, when I say there's a choice in a response, this is true probably in relationships in general, is sometimes you choose to do the right thing even if you don't feel like it, and other times you're moved by emotion, and you respond. And if your life is all choice, it becomes drudgery, it becomes discipline. It's difficult. But if it's only when you feel the need to or desire to respond, then you become unreliable.

And what faith is in some ways is both choice and response. Working together. Sometimes you're overwhelmed by who God is and what he's done. You want to choose. Other times you say, I'm choosing this because it's right, even if I don't feel like it. And so, offering a sacrifice will have both elements.

And here's what we see in Hebrews 13. Two things to offer. The first I'm just going to say is to offer worship to God. This is verse 15. It says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name." And so, this is the idea of offering worship to God. And here's what's happening. And that is, God wants us,

whether you're a person who's long been of faith or somebody who says I'm still trying to figure out how faith works and I'm not sure, I believe what God wants you to do is see who He is, what He's done on your behalf, and offer worship to him.

But what happens a lot of times is that we tend to see praise as something maybe we do spontaneously on our own, or we see it as something maybe we do in a corporate setting like the one we're in here today. But we tend to get into a zone where we start to evaluate and we start to say, what do I get out of church? What do I get out of praise? Rather than what do I bring? And here's what I mean, and I've been guilty of this, and that is you come through the doors to a place like Orchard Hill or any church, and you say, I hope the message is on something relevant that really matters to me today. I hope they do a couple of the songs I like. I hope they don't have that singer on today, that they have a different one. Come on, I know how this works. And what happens is we get into this evaluation mode where we're saying, I hope that this is good for me.

Now there's some naturalness to that. I'm not all against that. But do you realize that in church, the idea is ultimately that the audience is God, and that you and I, when we come here, are coming not to get but to offer. And so, what you're doing when you're coming is you're saying, God, I'm here to offer to you a little piece of myself in worship and praise to say you are great and you have done great things. But here's what's true. It is impossible to offer praise, worship, and devotion when you're in the evaluation process.

If you've ever been on a date, you know how this works. You go on the first date. Unless you're a psycho, you don't start with you're awesome. I love you. You're the best. You're in a proper evaluation mode. Do I want to go on a second date? Do I like this person? Are they interesting? But when you stay in evaluation mode too long, you can't express love and devotion. And when you're in evaluation mode of church, of God, of faith, you won't express love and devotion. What you will do instead is you will sit and you will say, well, I don't know.

Now, again, some of us might be properly in evaluation mode. And when I say properly, what I mean is you might be on the arm of a friend trying to say, do I believe in God? Is there really a God? My friend seems to believe it. I'm not sure that's appropriate, but some of us have been around church for years. We say we believe, and we still want to sit in evaluation mode rather than saying I come to express praise to God.

And by the way, there's something to the public coming to a gathering that virtual church does not do. The virtual church has a place. We stream. We're all about that. It has a place when you're sick, traveling, or tired. Okay, I get it. But there's something different about the way you relate to a screen in the privacy of your own room over the way that you express praise publicly. You can't express praise by yourself. That's public.

And if you're like me, which I'm not assuming you are, but if I'm honest, when I do virtual stuff, I'm hitting fast forward, skip ahead 10 seconds, I've heard this song, let's go, let's get to the message. And then when I start listening to the message, if I'm honest, I'm like, is this person saying anything I haven't heard? Click. But there's something about the I'm offering myself, not

to say what am I getting but what am I bringing to this? And it isn't just expressed verbally. In John 14 verse 15, we see this statement that Jesus makes. He says, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Worship isn't just words that are offered. It's our whole life being oriented toward God.

Romans chapter 12 says something very similar. Romans chapter 12, verses one and two says it this way. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice." Do you hear this sacrifice language? Since God has done for you, not debtors ethic, but because he's so good why would you do anything else than offer yourself to God in his ways? "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

See, there are two errors when it comes to worship. One is that we say my worship is my life, and so we're not maybe effusive with our words in our praise. And the other is to basically say I praise with my words, but my life is my thing. But if you've ever been in a relationship, you know that you actually need both. If you're married or dating and you're with somebody who says, I love you, you're great, you're awesome and then they do nothing to serve and partner with you in life, it feels a little shallow. And if you're with somebody who says I serve you and I partner with you all the time, but they never tell you with words what they appreciate, it also feels a little cold. What we want is, is the combination. And God is saying in a sense here, offer yourself as a living sacrifice. Let your praise be your offering. Let the very way that you live be part of how you offer praise to me.

Now, Hebrews 13 is a full chapter. Verses 15 and 16 are just a couple of verses. What takes place right before this are some verses that are somewhat perplexing when you read them. Verse 11 and following, "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."

And I say that's a little perplexing because when you read that, you say, what's the deal inside the camp, outside the camp, go to his disgrace, the enduring city, the city that's to come, or the temporary city. And what I think is going on here, at least in part, is it ties back to what's happening here in verse 15, where he says this, the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. Part of praise is being willing to identify with Christ in a culture that doesn't always want to recognize who Christ is.

And what I mean is, this inside outside the camp thing, there was a culture, it was a religious culture of the Jews of that day that said we're inside the camp, so to speak. But Jesus went outside and says, you have to go outside and bear his disgrace, lips that speak of who he is. This, it says, is a sacrifice of praise.

Kylee Griswold wrote an article recently. It's called "Courage Is A Christian's Only Path Forward From The Legal Hell The 'Winsome' Gospel Wrought." And here's her premise. In light of some of the recent court cases, she says There's this idea in Christianity that says that you have to be winsome all the time to everybody. And what that has done is it's caused people, people of faith, to say I'm more concerned about how I'm perceived, and this is her phrase, by God's enemies than I am by the gospel itself. And therefore, we've put ourselves in this predicament. Now, she says we, speaking of Christians.

Now obviously, Christianity has to be winsome. But her point, I think the point here of Hebrews 13, is sometimes you're going to be in a place if you are speaking words that are praiseworthy in worshiping God, in which your take is going to be different from culture and not popular in culture, and the idea of temporary or what is to come is just this idea of saying, are you going to trade the praise of God in order to get praise from people which is temporary or give praise to God who's eternal?

Now, one of the things that's true is that you and I will find it hard to express love if we're not confident of God's love for us. John Calvin once said this. He said, "You can't really love if you're not convinced of being loved." And what that communicates is just the importance of saying, if I'm going to express love, worship, and praise to God, then I have to know in the core of my being of God's love, and that comes from seeing and savoring what Jesus Christ has done. The Spirit's presence in your life.

Marilynne Robinson writes about this in a sideways way in her book *Housekeeping*. She's writing about a grandmother's love. But as in many of her writings, there's a secondary meaning. Here's what she says about a grandmother's love. She says, "She had always known a thousand ways to circle them all around with what must have seemed like grace. She knew a thousand songs, her bread was tender, her jelly was tart, and on rainy days she made cookies and applesauce. In the summer, she kept roses in a vase on the piano that had huge, pungent roses. And when the blossoms ripened and the petals fell, she put them in a tall Chinese jar with cloves and sticks of cinnamon. Her children slept on starch sheets under layers of quilts. And in the morning, her curtains filled the light the way sails filled the wind."

See, some of us maybe have had grandmas, moms, dads, or grandfathers who circled our lives about with thousands of demonstrations of grace. The God of the universe has given thousands of demonstrations of grace in every one of our lives. They are demonstrations of love. And if you can see that and savor that, then offering praise or worship to God will feel like it's a secondary nature, not something that has to be forced.

And one of the ways that you know, that your heart is a little cold to the things of God is when is when you feel like you're having to make a choice more than you're responding. And the choice feels more like drudgery rather than something that God is doing inside of you. Now again, in every relationship, everything will have a little bit of that, but there will be a sense in which you'll say this is me responding to what I sense in God.

So, the first thing here is offering worship to God. The second thing is verse 16, which I'm just going to say is offering ministry to people. And I use this phrase because verse 16 says, "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." And the idea is that it's easy to forget that God hasn't just worked in your life and given you a thousand demonstrations of grace so you can say this is awesome, but he wants you to also be a means of grace in other people's lives. And he says here to do good.

And when you read through the English Bible and you know a little bit about the original language, what happens is you expect then that the word good here is a certain word in the original language in Greek. But the problem is this word is a very unique word. It's only used one time in the New Testament. There are other words for good that I would have expected here. But this word is very unique. And here's why this matters. William Danker, who has written a lexicon, says that this word means socially laudable service. So why is it this unique word here?

I think the reason is that this isn't just a generic do good in the world, do whatever you see is good. But he's speaking specifically here about doing something that's socially laudable. So, see the juxtaposition here. What you have on one hand is you have him saying, listen, offer praise to God, and be willing basically to speak his name, lips that offer a sacrifice of praise. And then he says, but I want you to do it in the context of doing socially laudable, good things that are making a difference in the community.

Sometimes when we think about ministry, we think about vocational ministry, meaning people who have jobs in churches or parish church ministries or missionaries. But ministry is actually what everybody who's a follower of Jesus does wherever and however they live. Meaning, if you're in health care, you're asking the question, how does what I do in health care reflect kingdom values, the values of Jesus Christ? If you're in finance, if you're in construction, if you're in education, it means in your neighborhood, in your dorm room, in your college campus, you're asking the question, what does it look like for me where I am to reflect the values of the kingdom and bring that to bear right where I am today? Because you're called to do what's socially laudable, meaning helping to make this world thrive and have what goodness God brings. And that is part of it.

And if you want to see this in a few other places in the Bible, in Esther, chapter four, there's a story where Esther had become queen, and when she had become queen, there was a plot to kill all of the Jewish people in the land. And she was a Jew. And so, she was faced with this choice, do I try to conceal my identity and continue to just live this good life that I have, or do I do something about it? And her uncle comes to her and says this in verse 14 of chapter four, "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" You have a royal position. You have something that God has given you, and you have it not just to use for yourself, but to leverage it for the purposes of God's kingdom.

Acts chapter nine gives us something very similar. Verse 36, talks about a disciple named Tabitha, and it says this, "In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good." Now that's back to one of the more generic words for good. But again, what you see is this emphasis over and over in the New Testament with this idea of saying that you're offering your sacrifice of praise as worship to God, and it's doing ministry right where you are that brings good into the structures and the very essence of every place of our civilization.

And then it says this idea of doing good, sharing with others. And this is a word that maybe you've heard from the original language. It's Koinonia. It means fellowship. And so, what this is pointing to, I believe, is not just merely giving a donation to something and saying there, I did good. I gave a little money towards something. But Koinonia or fellowship means inviting people into your life. Now, obviously, you can't invite everybody into your life, but it means that there are some people that you are willing to walk with, to journey with, and to help in this world. And that that's the kind of ministry that God says, I'm pleased. It's a sacrifice of praise.

And again, we can make two errors. We can say, all of what I do is structural. I just bring good to the industry I'm in, to the place I'm in, or I'm all about individuals, but biblically, they're both true. Now, sometimes people will get annoyed, especially with Christians, because they'll say Christians are just always trying to convert people to their own way of thinking. They always think they're better than everybody else, and that they're superior. They're trying to convert everybody. Well, the truth is, we're all missionaries of something. And what I mean by that is you're a missionary for a sports team, a restaurant, an industry, or a product. Every time you say, oh, this thing's great to somebody else, you're a missionary for that.

And so, the idea of saying that the Christians are trying to convince people, of course, because if you believe what the Bible teaches, that every person is sinful and needs a savior and it's offered freely, then it's not you saying I'm better than everybody else, come be like me. It's not you saying, come be one of the good people like me, but you're saying we're all in need, and I'm pointing you to the one who has this opportunity, this way of bringing you into this opportunity, that God gives you.

Penn Jillette has spoken about this. If you're not familiar with him, he's a performer who's also publicly said he's an atheist. And he said this about proselytizing and being proselytized by people of faith. He says this about people who don't do it. He says I don't respect that at all. If you believe that there's a heaven and hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever it is that you think, and you don't think it's worth telling them, this is because it would make it socially awkward. And atheists think that there are people who shouldn't proselytize and think just leave them alone and keep your religion to yourself. He says, how much do you have to hate somebody not to proselytize them? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? If you believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you, or if I believe that a truck was coming at you and you didn't believe it, and that truck was bearing down on you, and at a

certain point I were to tackle you, I was actually doing it because I loved you. And then at one point, he says this. He says, now I know that there is no God and one polite person's invitation to this doesn't change that. But he basically says I don't respect you if you don't care enough to at least tell me about it. So, offering is saying I offer my praise, my life to God, and I offer ministry to people.

I don't know if you've ever been to an event when somebody is on one of these little crates or something, and they have a banner that usually says John 3:16. And then they start yelling at you when you're walking by. I always have this moment when I encounter this person. I kind of have this person banner-man in my mind. And I always have this moment and it's to say, I wish instead of coming out here and yelling at passers-by that you would actually love on somebody and then share with them, rather than just yelling at passers-by.

Now, to be fair, maybe some of you have come to faith through that. Maybe some of you say that that's really laudable, and there's a sense in which I love the courage of that. But the reason I tell you this is because my impulse is to say, I wish you would use that energy to build a relationship and share with somebody. But, you know, there's a lot of people who spend a lot of energy building relationships and never say anything.

And the dream in many ways of Orchard Hill, you heard about 35 years of KidsFest, has always been to be a place where people can find and follow Jesus Christ. Where this community, this region, this part of our world where more and more people would come to say, I know who Jesus is. I know of his love for me, and I want to orient my life around the God of the Bible and be empowered by His Spirit to live in a way that brings flourishing to this world.

And we do this through KidsFest. We do it through our mission in Haiti. We do it with our campuses, with our existing church facilities. All of the things that happen here. And there are so many ways to engage and be involved. But ultimately, it's about a group of people saying, I worship this God and where I live. I'm constantly aware that I've been placed by God to do good and to share this life with people. And when that happens, the Kingdom of God moves forward in our midst and we're all part of what God can do.

And I know that probably there are some of us who are gathered who are saying, well, that's nice. I'm not sure I believe. And that's understandable if that's where you are. But my simple word to you is this, and that is that the scriptures are very clear that every one of us can't earn our way through our goodness. But Jesus has been good on behalf of those who call on his name. And it's worth investigating, thinking about, and considering because if it's true, it changes everything. And so, I hope that you'll at least consider that.

Let's pray together. God, I thank you for each person who has gathered, and I ask that you would work today to help us choose to understand that in one sense we bring nothing and yet to offer ourselves freely and completely to you. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.